

Smell Theory

We hugged. Her thick black coat told
of fire, and the scent was in her hair
when she returned from the studio.
A tramp, to escape the cold snap, had no doubt
got into the lower part of the building
and built himself a little fire that prospered
too much, that alarmed the street before dawn,
smoked out the architects upstairs and
the manikin shop and the artists above them.
One of the neighborhood homeless that roamed
below the lofts, perhaps a Nez Perce
from up the river, shivering here
ten thousand years later without trees
or family or animals under steel and concrete
that curb the river. Stiff, puffy guys with
cigarettes stuck to lips, trying to keep warm.
Maybe a woman with them. They've got coats
but this freeze feels big as the nation.

~Harold Johnson